

VZCZCXRO0891
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHCV #0703/01 0751202
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 161202Z MAR 06
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3573
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEM COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 6139
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 5271
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ PRIORITY 1768
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 9975
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY 1057
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY 3622
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0616
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 1841
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE PRIORITY 0869
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY
RUEHMI/USOFFICE FRC FT LAUDERDALE PRIORITY 2898
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0558

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000703

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

COPENHAGEN FOR DLAWTON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/03/2021

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)

SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN ADVENTISTS ALSO UNDER BRV SUSPICION

Classified By: Robert Downes, Political Counselor,
for Reason 1.4(b).

Summary

¶1. (C) The Seventh-Day Adventist (SDA) Church is depicted in a government training film for "Ribas Mission" students as a fanatical religious sect that spreads terror among indigenous tribes and spies for the CIA, according to a video shown to Emboffs by SDA officials February 21. SDA officials thought government officials had agreed to pull the objectionable material, however, and even commented to Emboffs that (non-Catholic) religious broadcasting by the SDA had become more open under President Hugo Chavez. The 150,000 SDA population is mostly located in the interior of the country, especially in the southern plains region, and has sometimes been linked by the BRV with the New Tribes Mission (NTM). Despite having its world headquarters in Washington, DC, the SDA church does not rely on American missionaries and therefore has not had problems with religious visas. Like other small religious groups, the Adventists are trying to "go along to get along," aided by the fact that many of their members are at the same time adherents of the Bolivarian Revolution. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Poloff and USAID officer met with Pastor Josney Rodriguez, Secretary General of the Venezuelan-Antilles Adventist Union and coordinator of Adventist churches in eastern Venezuela, and other senior Adventist pastors on February 21 at their association site in Caracas. (Note: The Seventh-Day Adventists claim 150,000 members in Venezuela. The National Adventist Union headquarters is located in Barquisimeto, Lara State. Pastor Julio Palacio is the current head of the Venezuelan Union, which reports to the South America Division headquarters located in Miami, Florida. The SDA world headquarters is located in Washington, DC.)

Mision Ribas Video Accuses Adventists of Terror Tactics

13. (C) Rodriguez showed Emboffs clips supposedly taken last year from the "Lessons 11 and 12" video class of Mision Ribas, the BRV-sponsored high school equivalency certification program. The unit topic was "foreign missionaries in Venezuela," presented by an on-screen professor. The professor introduced the topic by showing selective scenes from the 1986 movie "The Mission," depicting 18th Century indigenous tribespeople building churches and making furniture for foreign missionaries. The action cuts to scenes of the indigenous being slaughtered by musket-bearing foreign troops. (Note: "The Mission" is actually about Jesuits living with the Guarani in colonial Brazil. The movie's climax has the Jesuit missionaries trying to protect the indigenous people from Portuguese soldiers. None of this is explained by the professor in the Mision Ribas video, however, leaving students with the impression that missionaries participated in the massacre.)

14. (C) At the end of the movie scene, the professor says that subjugation of the indigenous in Venezuela continues to the modern era in the form of the New Tribes Mission and SDA church. Characteristics of these groups flash on the screen as the professor ticks them off: "fanatical preaching, fear and submission, doctrine of terror, and espionage." In the video, the professor then proceeds to read from a book published in Venezuela in the 90s about NTM, saying that such foreign missionary groups spy on behalf of the CIA. The piece appeared to be presented in its entirety, and did not offer any historical or factual context for the opinions expressed by the official BRV video lesson. (Note: It is thought that some two million Venezuelans are enrolled in

CARACAS 00000703 002 OF 002

Mision Ribas.)

But Adventists See The Bright Side

15. (C) The Adventists also showed Emboffs a video prepared in response to the Ribas video explaining the presence of Adventists in eastern indigenous areas for the past 75 years and showing the results of Adventist social programs there. Rodriguez said that Adventists within Chavismo had clued them into the controversial Ribas video, and also served as a communication bridge back to BRV officials to complain privately. Rodriguez said he believed the offending video had been removed from circulation, based on reports from church members. The link to the New Tribes (ref) did have the effect last October, Rodriguez reported, of having Venezuelan army units visit the SDA's school for indigenous students in the Gran Sabana near the Brazilian border. In Rodriguez' opinion, however, the officials went away impressed with the school's operation and did not return.

16. (C) Despite the obvious affronts in the government video, the Adventists said that, in some ways, life for the religious minority had become easier under the Chavez regime. The BRV's friction with the Catholic Church, for example, has loosened the latter's grip on religious broadcasting, making it easier for Adventist television and radio stations to broadcast. Poloff also pointed out that the SDA Church had representation on the censorship board of telecommunications regulator CONATEL, while the Catholics did not. Rodriguez answered, however, that he was not aware whether the board, a by-product of the Social Responsibility Law ("Ley RESORTE"), had ever formally convened.

Adventists With U.S. Roots, But Few Foreigners

17. (C) Asked about the ease with which Adventist missionaries receive religious visas, Rodriguez said the SDA in Venezuela

has very few foreign missionaries in country. The 150,000-strong membership, he said, largely depends on Venezuelan pastors for their administration and therefore had not experienced the visa problems of other groups. Rodriguez added that the SDA population is decentralized outside of Caracas, which is why the national headquarters is in Barquisimeto. The church's presence among the indigenous, Rodriguez related, stems from a century-old prophesy by a local chief ("cacique") that foreign missionaries would one day come to their village, which happened decades later. The result is the oddity of some nearly all-Adventist indigenous villages in the Gran Sabana (as well as in Delta Amacuro).

Comment

18. (C) Like many religious minority groups in Venezuela, the Adventists are finding the path of least resistance the most effective way of existence, even if it means brushing off outlandish accusations like the one in the Ribas video. For some reason, the BRV seems to have left the SDA out of its edict to expel foreign missionary groups from indigenous areas, for now at least. This could be explained by SDA's tendency to use Venezuelan religious workers, who would be much harder to dislodge from any part of Venezuelan territory. Also, many SDA members come from the poorer classes that tend to support Chavez.

BROWNFIELD